REMARKS

Applicants' undersigned counsel thanks the Examiner for the careful consideration given the application. Claims 17 and 29 have been amended to correct informalities. Figure 6 and references to Figure 6 in the specification have been deleted.

In the previous Office action the Examiner rejected claims 17-21 and 32 under 35 U.S.C. 102 as being unpatentable over any of Taylor, Cornic or Butler et al. Applicant respectfully traverses this rejection. None of these references teach or even suggest a container for the transport of nuclear fuel assemblies. On the contrary, each of Taylor and Butler et al. concerns a nuclear reactor, whereas Cornic concerns a steam generator.

More precisely, in Taylor, the core 7 of a gas cooled nuclear reactor rests on a diagrid 8 and is surrounded by angle plates 15 interconnected by compensating links16. This unit is located in a pressure vessel 1 surrounded by a biological shield 2 and mounted into the latter by means of radial webs 3. Each plate 15 is supported within the vessel 1 by radial supports 21, including a piston-cylinder unit 22, 24.

In addition to the fact that this reference does not concern a fuel transport container, it does not disclose any "compartment" adapted to receive a fuel assembly and including an opening at a distal end of the compartment in the longitudinal direction as required by claim 17. Indeed, the core 7 is formed of adjacent graphite bricks pressed directly one against the other by the plates 21.

In Butler et al., substantially the same arrangement as in Taylor is described. See the pressure vessel 3, the biological shield 31 and the adjacent graphite bricks 1, 2 forming the reactor core.

Finally, Cornic shows a steam generator in which the U-shaped vertical tubes of a tube bundle 2 are held or secured by horizontal spacer plates 13 secured within the outer envelope 1 and the bundle envelope 6 of the steam generator, via welded securing abutments shown in figure 3. In addition to the fact that this reference does not show or suggest a fuel transport container, it must be underlined that a steam generator does not include any nuclear fuel assembly nor any adjustable clamping means which could be compared to the claimed clamping means.

Applicant respectfully traverses the rejection based on Stelle, Burger, or JP 041692 in

view of Butler, for the reasons set forth above. These four references concern clamping devices for nuclear reactor cores formed of adjacent nuclear fuel assemblies, in direct contact one against the other, surrounded by segmented plates. There is no teaching, in any of these references, to transfer such clamping means in a compartment adapted to receive a single nuclear fuel assembly, as in a nuclear fuel transfer device as required by claim 17.

For the reasons set forth above, it is believed that claim 17 defines over the cited art. As all other pending claims depend from claim 17, it is believed that the claims define over the applied references and that the claims accordingly are in condition for allowance. All objections and rejections from the Office have now been addressed and a notice of allowance is respectfully requested.

If there are any fees required by this communication, please charge such fees to our Deposit Account No. 16-0820, order No. 34988.

Respectfully submitted,

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Version of the claims showing amendments:

17. (Three times amended) A transport device for housing a long length nuclear fuel assembly, said device comprising:

a compartment having substantially the same length as the fuel assembly, said compartment having fixed walls extending in a longitudinal direction and defining an interior space of the compartment, and an opening at a distal end of the compartment in said longitudinal direction;

a fixed structure rigidly attached to one of said fixed walls of the compartment, and comprising at least one fixed guide element extending in a transverse direction transverse to the longitudinal direction of the compartment;

a mobile structure that can be moved in the transverse direction to apply pressure on the fuel assembly, the mobile structure comprising at least one transverse mobile guide element slidably engaging the fixed guide element on the fixed structure,

an adjustable clamping device comprising:

[at least one] a pneumatic cavity configured to provide a force on the mobile structure in said transverse direction thereby adjusting a clamping force of the mobile structure on the fuel assembly in response to pressure changes in the pneumatic cavity, and

[a gas] an air inlet control device located at said distal end of said compartment in the longitudinal direction and configured to provide air to said pneumatic cavity to clamp the fuel assembly in a fixed position within the compartment.

29. (Twice amended) Device according to claim 17, wherein the combined guide elements and the adjustable clamping device comprise:

a cylindrical jack body with a transverse axis, rigidly attached to the fixed structure comprising a guide rod in which a compressed air inlet duct has been formed along its axis projecting from its free end, a plurality of cylindrical chambers at its periphery with an axis parallel to the jack axis, each of the chambers containing a compression spring, the springs clamping the mobile structure into the fuel assembly,

a fixed piston rigidly attached to the said free end of the guide rod comprising a seal at its periphery,

a mobile collar rigidly attached to the mobile structure located inside the jack body and adjusted to the shape of said jack body, this collar being inserted between the fixed piston and the jack body and sliding along the guide rod along a corresponding bore formed in said collar, said collar also comprising at its periphery a plurality of housings that nest in an adjusted manner into each of the chambers by moving transversely to the longitudinal direction of the fuel assembly,

wherein said air inlet control device comprises a compressed gas supply means opening at [the] an accessible end of the compartment and carrying gas into a pneumatic cavity located between the fixed piston and the mobile collar through the duct.